DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 195 454 SO 012 918

AUTHOR Harris, Thomas E.
TITLE Introducing Analysis of Conflict Theory Into the Social Science Classroom.
PUB DATE Apr 80
NOTE 10p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Skills: *Conflict Resolution: Higher Education: *Learning Activities: Social Sciences

ABSTRACT

The paper provides a simplified introduction to conflict theory through a series of in-class exercises. Conflict resolution, defined as negotiated settlement, can occur through three forms of communication: tacit, implicit, and explicit. Tacit communication, taking place without face-to-face or written interaction, refers to inferences made and action taken on the basis of mutual knowledge or assumptions about the other's probable responses. Implicit communication is the expression of intent to perform some act. Explicit communication is action performed. Classroom exercises illustrating each form of communication in conflict situations are described. Tacit communication is illustrated by situations in which two parties must act to achieve a common goal, without opportunity to communicate: their action must be based on assumptions made about the other's response, based on acquaintance with the common knowledge and culture shared by both. Implicit communication is illustrated by situations in which three parties engage in negotiations in which offers and counteroffers, which may benefit or injure the parties in varying degrees, are made before action is taken. Important conflict-resolution concepts illustrated in these exercises are power relationships, persuasion, inducement, and constraint. Explicit communication is illustrated by the "Prisoners' Dilemma," in which two prisoners accused of a crime are separated and given the option of confessing or not confessing. The punishment each will receive depends both on his own response and on the unknown response of the other prisoner. Important conflict-resolution concepts illustrated by this exercise are gain, preservation, trust, competition, cooperation, and perception of self and others. The author stresses that while for the purpose of the exercises the three forms of communication are separate from each other, in reality they interact with each other in almost every conflict situation. (Author/KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Thomas E. Harris

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED195454

Introducing Analysis of Conflict Theory Into the Social Science Classroom

by Thomas E. Harris

Most educators recognize the increasing importance of helping their students become aware of the role of conflict in the study of any human interaction including the perspectives of economics, political science, history, psychology, literature, and communication. The purpose of this article is to define conflict from a framework that allows simplified introduction of conflict theory and understanding into the classroom through a series of exercises designed to aid the student. Anatol Rapaport in Fights, Games, and Debates gives a strong rationale for studying conflict.

> I suspect that the most important result of a systematic and many-sided study of conflict would be the changes which such a study could effect in ourselves, the conscious and unconscious, the willing and unwilling participants in conflicts. Thus, the rewards to be realistically hoped for are the indirect ones, as was the case with the sons who were told to dig for buried treasure in the vineyard. They found no treasure, but they improved the soil.

SP 012 918

Conflict situations tend to be either ignored or viewed as chaotic, irrational actions. Some have argued that conflict and the common strategies associated with conflict require means, and sometimes ends, that are opposite to the ideals of society. Specifically, those principals whose means of persuasion center on conflict are often seen as despots or totalitarians. However, conflict is not always bad and, in any case, is with us. In fact, any cursory view of history, for example, will show that peace (no conflict) is the exception in world events rather than the rule. Conflicts range from international politics where there are wars and threats of war, to classrooms where there is competition for grades, to the weekly football games where highly institutionalized and symbolic forms of conflict are enacted.

For the purposes of this article, I define conflict as a struggle over scarce power, status, and resources. Conflict behavior should be considered essentially a bargaining strategy not necessarily limited to explicit concessions, and conflict resolution should be considered negotiated settlement. The advantages of this view are multiple and will become more obvious with further development. Two primary advantages are: (1) conflict can develop over intangibles (power and status) and well as tangibles (resources); and (2) recognizing conflict as requiring bargaining strategies reminds us that conflict occurs when interests are not always totally divergent. Often we are in conflict and still share mutual goals.

With such a perspective and definition, it is useful to consider communication as an important element in a conflict situation. Communication represents one of several strategies leading to conflict, and enhanced communication may be the best strategy leading to conflict resolution. Rarely does a bargaining session occur when the participants do not reflect a "failure to communicate" or "a communication breakdown." I define three possible forms of communication in the conflict situation: tacit, implicit, and explicit. Each form of communication will be delineated within the context of conflict in the following sections, and exercises for demonstrating the communication dynamics will be suggested.

I

Tacit communication is often defined as "no communication" because the participants do not directly engage in face-to-face interactions. However, by strict definition, if the participants are engaged in achieving a mutual goal and depend on each other's actions to achieve that goal, then communication of some form can be said to exist.

In The Strategy of Conflict, Thomas Schelling uses the term tacit bargaining to identify those istuations of conflict calling upon cultural and situational factors to coordinate conflict resolution among the participants.

Schelling gives numerous examples of how this type of communication can be demonstrated to the classroom. I cite a few of his examples here to illustrate tacit communication.

(1) You and another person you know are to meet in Grand Central Station in New York City, but you did not agree on the hour of the meeting. You both must agree on the exact minute of the day for the meeting.

(2) Circle one of the following numbers listed. You and another person you know win if you both circle the same number without consultation with each other. The numbers are: 7, 100, 13, 99, and 55.

(3) You and another person you know are each given a piece of paper one of which is marked with an "X" and one is blank. The one who gets the blank sheet has the choice of leaving it blank or writing an "X" on it. The one who gets the "X" piece has the choice of leaving it alone or erasing the "X". If when you have made your choice, there is an "X" on only one of the sheets, the holder of the "X" gets $3.00 and the holder of the blank gets $2.00. If both sheets have "X's" or both sheets are blank, neither person gets anything. Your sheet of paper has the origional "X" on it. Do you leave it alone or erase it ?

In these three problems tacit agreement is dependent on two interacting factors--culture and knowledge of the other person's probable response. From the cultural channel, we know the majority of people will answer the first problem "twelve noon," the second problem "100," and the third problem by leaving the "X".

The overriding channel of tacit communication, however, is knowledge of the other's probable response. Yet knowledge of the other's response is contaminated by the participants' attempts to account for <u>each other's</u> probable response. Known as an infinite regress, we find tacit communication is often thinking about your choice about the other's choice about your choice--and so on to infinity. In spite of this possibility, I have found from numerous tests of these and other similiar problems a very high agreement ratio indicating the influence of tacit communication in conflict and conflict resolution.

II

The second form of communication in the conflict situation I identify as implicit communication. Implicit communication is the expression of intent to perform some act. The bargaining that takes place within implicit communication introduces a wide variety of concepts important to the study of conflict.

Since implicit communication is an intent, influence of the other participants is central to the concept. All means of influence are symbolic. Implicit communication and bargaining depend on the means of symbolic influences used. Gamson, in Power and Discontent, identifies three means of influence: persuasion, inducement, and constraint. These are three means of influence that will occur within implicit communication channels. What becomes of interest to the instructor is the manner and conditions in which those factors are used. Power relationships in conflict, for example, become very important. There are a number of simple exercises to emphasize this and other concepts of strategy.

"Split the $100" is an exercise typical for demonstrating power relationships, establishing influence attempts, and for exploring the perishableness of commitment within implitic communication channels. For the exercise, three teams are formed and given the task of dividing the $100 prize. The prize will be awarded to the two teams who reach argeement on how the $100 will be split. Each team can send a bargaining representative to any other team offering a proposed agreement. No two representatives from different teams can appear before the same group simultaneously. All negotiations are kept secret at the discretion of the teams involved. Once any two teams reach agreement, and they consider such agreement the final and binding agreement, the game is over.

The dynamics of the exercise usually begin with two teams agreeing on a 50-50 split. The third team, being left out, then finds they can afford to take some loss in order to gain a little something. They usually offer something on the order of a 40-60 split to one of the other teams. Accounting for greed, this means that one of the originally agreeing teams has been left out. They now face the decision of offering a larger share to the favored team in the last agreement (such as 30-70) or approaching the weaker team and offering a 50-50 split. Practice with this exercise has demonstrated that some time limit must be established since there is more likelihood of not reaching agreement than for a binding agreement to be established.

Observe the number of variables associated with conflict and conflict resolution that develop from this simple exercise. Among the variables should be: trust, defection, agreement, persuasion by negotiation, coalition development, threats and promises, and commitment. Crucially, this exercise underscores that none of these eight variables can be absolutely predicted or guaranteed through implicit communication.

Translating beyond this exercise, we find the same problems exist in domestic and international conflicts. Peace negotiations in Vietnam provide a recent example. The United States and North Vietnam could have concluded a "50-50" treaty which would have removed American troops quickly and allowed the North Vietnamese great freedom of action after American withdrawal. Faced with this possibility, the South Vietnamese would have been forced to negotiate with one of the two countries to try and change the split. Perhaps Saigon could have offered the United States a sure victory in a few months and attempted to leave the North out of any agreement. In any event, the process of negotiation over alliances where three parties must divide limited resources occurs in varied degrees in many conflict situations. Unlimited, unreasonable, or conflicting demands over scarce resources is the norm in most negotiations that have the potential for esculation.

III

Ideal explicit communication is the presentation of unequivocable meaning. Whereas implicit communication was an expression of intent, explicit communication is action performed. There are two considerations to be given explicit communication: (1) ideal explicit communication where a relationship of confidence exists among participants and acts by any participant are correctly interpreted by the other participants; and (2) imperfect explicit communication where a trust relation is not developed among the participants and acts by one of the participants are not correctly interpreted by the other participants.

The "Prisoner's Dilemma" is a game rich in conflict strategies. In the Prisoner's Dilemma, as origionally established, two prisoners are brought to a police station and placed in seperate rooms. Each is told that he has two alternatives: to confess to a crime the police are sure they have committed or not to confess. Using the concept of the Prisoner's Dilemma introduces the concepts of gain and preservation. A simple matrix can be drawn for the potential outcomes.

		Prisoner A: Confesses	Prisoner A: Does not Confess
Prisoner B	Confesses	Both A and B get less than maximum sentence for the major charge. (Gain-Gain)	A gets maximum sentence B gets lenient treatment (Gain-Preservation)
	Does Not Confess	A gets lenient treatment B gets maximum sentence (Preservation-Gain)	Both A and B get off with light sentences on minor charges (Preservation-Preservation)

As the matrix shows, the gain-gain situation occurs when individuals seeking a particular benefit are brought into conflict with each other.

The gain-preservation situation assumes players with different motivations. For one player to win, the other must be worse off than he was at the beginning of the game. Therefore, the motivation of each player is not only to win, but also to lose as little as possible if winning does not occur. Income legislation is an example of where players, in this case taxpayers, can both win and lose depending on the outcome.

The preservation-preservation conflict is the most difficult to comprehend. In this case, neither player is trying to win from the other but simply wishes to guarantee his own safety. Perhaps the best example would be an arms race between two countries. Although neither country apparently plans any immediate aggression, each country reacts to the other's military moves with corresponding moves of their own. Most of the theory of deterrence is based on the preservation principle. These theoretical aspects can be richly demonstrated in class through the use of successive trials of the Prisoner's Dilemma Game. Among the aspects of a trust relationship in a conflict situation are: (1) the participant's perception of the game (does he see it as a competative or cooperative exercise?); (2) the participant's perception of the other (is the other to be trusted; will he cooperate or compete; if he cooperates, will he defect ?); and (3) the participant's perception of himself. A perfect recent example of all of these possibilities was the Watergate Caper. Not only did all the principals face these options, but G. Gordon Liddy defied any easy social science explanation by choosing to remain quiet even after the apparent trust relationships had been destroyed. Any issues such as loyalty, trust, friendship, commitment, binds (including double-binds such as loyalty oaths versus personal values, and so on), cooperation, and collusion can be developed in debriefing from the exercise.

IV

The proceeding exercises demonstrate the various types of communication possible in a conflict setting. For purposes of explanation I have implied that the three forms of communication within the conflict situation are on a continium,and, therefore, are distinct from each other. More realistically, all three forms of communication interact with each other in almost every conflict situation. In fact, the seperation of the three is only useful for demonstration purposes. The interaction of the three modes of communication may also complicate the conflict situation as Erving Goffman demonstrates in Strategic Interaction.

One of the difficulties of studying conflict has been obtaining the dynamics of a conflict situation without the potential damage of real conflct. The discussion presented here provides a means to demonstrate the various aspects relevant to understanding and dealing with conflict and still maintain the hypothetical nature of the exercises and value of a relatively unemotional debriefing. The games and simulations give the student the opportunity to understand conflict by actively participating in a conflict situation. The power of this type of exercise was emphasized by Marshall McLuhan in War and Peace in the Global Village. "Real play, like the whodunit, throws the stress on process rather than product, giving the audience (in this case students) the chance of being a maker rather than a mere consumer."

Any attempt to understand human interaction requires an understanding of the dynamics of conflict. For that matter, any reading of the daily paper emphasizes that conflict situations and the need to understand and deal with them is a reality that cannot be ignored by the instructor.

Selected Readings

Kenneth E. Boulding, Conflict and Defense: A General Theory (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962).

Arthur Cohen, Attitude Change and Social Influence (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1964).

Paul H. Conn, Conflict and Decision Making: An Introduction to Political Science (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

Lewis Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict (New York: The Free Press, 1956).

William Gamson, Power and Discontent (Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1968).

Erving Goffman, Strategic Interaction (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969).

R. Duncan Luce and Howard Raiffa, Games and Decisions (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1957).

Marshall McLuhan, War and Peace in the Global Village (New York: Banham Books, 1968).

Wolf Mendl, Deterrence and Persuasion (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970).

Michael Nicholson, Conflict Analysis (New York: Barnes and Boble, 1960).

Anatol Rapaport, Fights, Games, and Debates (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1960).

Thomas Schelling, The Strategy of Conflict (London: Oxford University Press, 1960).

J. W. Thibaut and H. H. Kelly, The Social Psychology of Groups (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1959).